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A SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE

THE RIGHT REVEREND

LORD BISHOP OF LONDON,

AT THE

CONSECRATION

OF THE CHURCH OF

ST. PAUL, COVENT-GARDEN,

AUGUST 1ſt, 1798.

By RICHARD BULLOCK, D.D.
RECTOR OF THAT PARISH.

PUBLISHED BY DESIRE OF HIS LORDSHIP AND THE TRUSTEES OF THE BUILDING.

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1798.

TO

THE RIGHT REVEREND

BEILBY

LORD BISHOP OF LONDON,

THIS DISCOURSE

IS,

WITH THE GREATEST RESPECT,

INSCRIBED,

BY

HIS LORDSHIP'S

MOST OBEDIENT

HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

LUKE XIX. 46.

IT IS WRITTEN, MY HOUSE IS THE HOUSE OF PRAYER.

THE Evangeliſt tells us, that when our Lord went into the Temple, and began to caſt out them that ſold therein, and them that bought, he ſaid unto them, "It is written, My houſe is the houſe of prayer."

THAT a people ſo ſuperſtitiouſly devoted to their temple, as the Jews, who, when at a diſtance, never prayed but with their faces turned towards it; nor, when on the ſpot, retired from it, but in the ſame reſpectful manner;—that ſuch a people ſhould have permitted any part of their conſecrated and favourite temple to be ſo flagrantly profaned, is to be accounted for only from their ſovereign contempt

for all other people; and in conſequence, from their conſidering thoſe parts of the temple, in which the Gentiles were permitted to worſhip, as polluted by their preſence, and rendered fit for the meaneſt traffic. But our Saviour knew, "That the Houſe of God was to be to all, who "enter there, the houſe of prayer."

THE reaſons which induced men to fix on certain places for public worſhip, ſuggeſted the neceſſity of inveſting ſuch places with ſuitable dignity and ſolemnity, and in courſe ſuggeſted their total ſeparation from common uſes, and their entire appropriation to thoſe of religion; in a word, their conſecration,—a practice of moſt remote antiquity, adopted under various forms by different people, and continued down to us under *that*, which we have now witneſſed, when, in compliance with our humble petition, the Lord Biſhop of the Dioceſe has been pleaſed to conſecrate this church to God's ſervice.

THOUGH under ſuch a ſanction, the propriety of the meaſure cannot be queſtioned; yet, as the ſubject muſt be new to many, a ſhort account of its conformity with the deciſions of antient wiſdom will not, it is hoped, be deemed improper on the preſent occaſion.

WHATEVER

WHATEVER might be the origin of ſacrifice, or the received idea of it, in the firſt ages of the world, to ſuppoſe that pious men then conſidered it as the only worſhip the Lord required of them, is to reduce human nature in its infancy almoſt to the ſtandard of the Roman ſatiriſt *. When therefore we ſo frequently read in Scripture, and always in the ſame terms, of "altars built unto the Lord," there is reaſon to conclude, that this practice of building altars unto the Lord, for the purpoſe of ſacrifice, comprehended alſo the conſecration of places for other purpoſes of divine worſhip—and for the riſe of this cuſtom we might be juſtified in going far back indeed. For though it is not expreſsly ſaid, that Cain and Abel brought their reſpective offerings unto the ſame, or unto any "altar built unto "the Lord," yet both theſe inferences ariſe from the hiſtory; and if ſo, what more unlikely, than that two men of ſuch oppoſite diſpoſitions ſhould have choſen the ſame place, and probably the ſame time too, for any act of religion, had not that place been already appointed, and conſecrated to God's ſervice? not to inſiſt on the authority of commentators, who infer as much from the language of the ſacred hiſtorian, in his report of that memorable

* Hor. Sat. l. i. 3.

tranſaction. But we are expreſsly told, that Noah, ſo ſoon as liberated from the ark, "built an altar unto the "Lord," in conformity, doubtleſs, with the uſage of former days: and doth not the well-known character of Noah, "that he was a juſt man, and perfect in his gene-"rations, and a preacher of righteouſneſs before the flood," lead us to ſuppoſe, that, whatever his notion of ſacrifice might be, in building that altar unto the Lord, he meant to conſecrate a place to the public worſhip of the Lord, for himſelf and his family?

In like manner when Abraham ſo frequently changed his place of abode, we find him almoſt on every change, either building an altar, or planting a grove, and calling on the name of the Lord there. Whether therefore altar or grove, it was apparently a firſt object with him, wherever ſettled, to have a place conſecrated to public worſhip; nor is it improbable that his grove at Beerſheba, and Noah's altar on Mount Ararat, might have led to the *uſe* of groves and high places for religious exerciſes in after ages, though their natural gloom and grandeur might have contributed to its *continuance*.

DURING this period, the conſecration of a place to public worſhip ſeems to have been conſidered as a means of attracting the notice and attention of the deity worſhipped there. Nor was this idea lowered, but much the contrary, when men began to conſecrate larger buildings to Divine Worſhip; for then it was ſoon aſſerted, and generally ſuppoſed, that a Divine Preſence was attached to ſuch buildings by conſecration; and they were in conſequence uſually called the houſes of their reſpective deities. What people introduced this improvement on the original plan, is a queſtion of no ſmall difficulty; but, without recurring, as ſome have done, to the tower of Babel, that there were ſuch buildings in Egypt before the Iſraelites left it, will not admit of a doubt, whether it be allowed or not, that they were all deſtroyed in the night of the Paſſover *. And that there were many ſuch elſewhere, in very early times, appears from Scripture, which frequently mentions the houſe of Peor, or Beth-Peor; the houſe of the ſun, or Bethſhemeſh; and many other ſuch buildings, evidently called *houſes* from a ſuppoſed preſence, or inhabitation of the deities to whom they were dedicated. This notion, it is true, like moſt others in theology, was carried to ſuch an exceſs in the pagan world, as to have deterred a famous

* Exodus, xii. 12.

ſect:

ſect of philoſophers from the uſe of temples; nay, to have determined whole nations to confine themſelves to groves, or mountains, for the purpoſes of their religion, rather than be ſuſpected of an attempt to confine their deities within walls.

Such exceptions, however, were comparatively few; and they only prove, that this notion of an immediate preſence was much abuſed.

In compliance, probably, with ſuch uſages, and in ſome degree with ſuch opinions, the Jewiſh tabernacle was built in the wilderneſs, and afterwards the temple at Jeruſalem. For whether by divine command, or, as ſome contend, permiſſion only, the ſimplicity of the wiſdom from above warrants the conjecture, that in both thoſe buildings much was granted to the taſte and manners of the times. Thus both exceeded all other edifices of the ſort in ſtate and magnificence; to both were given ſenſible proofs of the Divine Preſence; and both were diſtinguiſhed by that moſt honourable of all titles "The Houſe of God."

To purſue the inquiry through ſubſequent periods to the birth of Chriſt would be little more than a repetition. I haſten,

haſten, therefore, to the commencement of the Chriſtian æra.—And here the deference paid by Chriſt and his Apoſtles to places conſecrated to public worſhip, is too well known to be recited: nor were their immediate followers leſs inclined, though for a while utterly unable to purſue all the ſteps of their predeceſſors, or to act as they devoutly wiſhed: long, however, before Chriſtianity was protected by any civil powers, and the moment it could be done with any tolerable ſafety, this primæval practice was moſt eagerly renewed in many provinces of the Roman empire; and no ſooner was the free profeſſion of the faith permitted, than churches were built, and conſecrated, in almoſt every quarter. Unfortunately indeed a pagan error ſoon crept in, and for a long time prevailed ſo far, as to eſtabliſh an idea, that the greater the number of the churches built, and the more ſplendid their ornaments, the greater would be the individual intereſts of the founders in the Divine Protection; till at length the evil became enormous, and demanded a reformation. But why run, as too many have done ſince, into the contrary extreme? Though many pontifical decorations were with propriety to be reprobated, ſurely the ſimplicity of Chriſt's religion doth not require the roughneſs of the ſtable, in which Chriſt was born.

To the better conceived liberality and piety of our anceſtors, this country owes many churches, in which the proper medium has been happily preſerved: amongſt others, the noble founder of this Pariſh *, well aware that devotion might be animated by decent ſolemnity, without the aids of ſuperſtitious art, employed the firſt architect of his day †, and *at his own ſole expence* built a church, which might have proved an almoſt perpetual monument of *his* munificence and of the *artiſt's* taſte ‡. The deplorable accident by which it was at length re-

* Francis Earl of Bedford. † Inigo Jones.

‡ A noble author tells us, that "the barn-roof of Covent Garden Church "ſtrikes his eyes with as little idea of dignity or beauty, as it could do, if it "covered nothing but a barn;" and to juſtify this cenſure, he ſubjoins the following note; viz. "Mr. Onſlow, the late ſpeaker, told me an anecdote, that *corroborates my idea* of this building. When the Earl of Bedford ſent for Inigo, he told him he wanted a chapel for the pariſhioners of Covent Garden; but added, he would not go to any *conſiderable* expence: in ſhort, ſaid he, I would not have it much better than a barn. Well then, replied Inigo, you ſhall have the handſomeſt barn in England."—See Anecdotes of Painting, &c. vol. ii. p. 274.

Now the Earl of Bedford did, by this noble author's own account in the ſame page, expend £.4,500 on this building, a ſum rather *conſiderable* in thoſe days, eſpecially on what was not *to be much better than a barn.* But the date of the Earl's death, viz. May 9th, 1641, and that of Mr. Onſlow's, viz. February 17th, 1768, ſhew on what ſlight foundations a tale m y reſt, that ſhall *corroborate the ideas* of the Apologiſt for Richard the Third.

duced

duced to its bare walls is but too well known. Under this grievous affliction, however, the Pariſhioners had the courage to think of rebuilding their favourite church on its old foundations *. They foreſaw the burden, and the difficulties of the attempt; but their cauſe was good, and their zeal was proportionate. The attempt was made; and in times above all others unfavourable to ſuch an undertaking, taxed in common with their neighbours for the ſupport of the ſtate, and labouring under *peculiar* † and very heavy preſſures of their own, this ſmall pariſh has rebuilt their church at an expence of *great* † magnitude, notwithſtanding the utmoſt attention of the truſtees, both to the expenditure, and the mode of raiſing the neceſſary ſupplies. The taſk, however, is at length accompliſhed by

* Encroachments having been made upon the ſimplicity of the old church, and its interior parts in particular being in a ruinous ſtate, it was thought expedient, about ten years ago, to put the whole into thorough repair; to reſtore its original outline, and caſe it with Portland ſtone; to cover its roof with ſlate; and to refit it within in a ſuitable ſtyle †. The conduct of the buſineſs was then committed to Mr. THOMAS HARDWICK, of Rathbone Place, who executed his charge to the entire ſatisfaction of his employers; and that gentleman has diſplayed ſo much ſkill and taſte in rebuilding it, as juſtly entitles his name to be recorded in conjunction with that of Inigo Jones.

† This repair coſt nearly £. 12,000. The rebuilding, &c. £. 13,500.

 their

their own exertions; no recourſe was had to the uſual method of raiſing money on ſuch occaſions, by briefs: and though the public feelings muſt have been touched by the ſtrangeneſs, as well as the weight of their misfortune, no relief was to be expected from the public purſe. It now lies with themſelves to juſtify, by a proper uſe of it, the accommodation which has been obtained for them with ſo much difficulty. Yes, my friends, while I congratulate you collectively, on having once more a church of your own, this day conſecrated to public worſhip; a church of your *own* raiſing, and ſo much to your *general* credit; I muſt remind you, that whether it is to prove a real and important advantage to you *individually*, or worſe than an unprofitable burden, depends on your own diſcretion.

But here again it is neceſſary to ſtate to you, and I am enabled to do it with preciſion; that, whatever may have been the opinions of former ages, the conſecration of any place to Divine Worſhip pretends to no more at this day, than to ſeparate it from all common uſes; to appropriate it to religious purpoſes; to inveſt it with a ſolemnity to command reverence, and ſtrengthen devotion; and to offer up prayers to the Throne of Grace for the Divine benediction upon it. Nor does the ſubſtance of the prayers now

offered on behalf of this building, amount to more than the words of King Solomon, at the conſecration of his temple: "Behold, Lord, the heaven of heavens cannot con-" tain thee; how much leſs this houſe that I have built; " but, let thine eyes be open towards this houſe, that " thou mayeſt hearken unto the prayers that thy ſervant " ſhall make towards this place." And yet, when we recollect thoſe comfortable words of our bleſſed Lord; " Where two or three are gathered together in my name, " I will be there in the midſt of them;" we ſcruple not to ſay farther, in the animated language of the Patriarch: " This is none other but the houſe of God, and this is " the gate of heaven."

It has been remarked by a moſt reſpectable writer *, " That the houſe of prayer is a ſpiritual and chriſtian " idea, the Jewiſh temple being properly a houſe of ſa-" crifice, and not of prayer;" which remark, if founded, ſeems to militate againſt ſome of the foregoing obſervations. But admitting, as the ſame author ſuppoſes, that under a diſpenſation ſo pregnant with rites and ceremonies, there was no expreſs precept for prayer in the Jewiſh

* Biſhop Hurd, in his Diſcourſe on the Buyers and Sellers, &c.

temple; yet that the neceſſity of prayer in God's houſe was acknowledged, and the duty itſelf performed there, the Scriptures will not permit us to doubt, any more than that the law and the prophets were uſually read and expounded *there*, and in their ſynagogues *. Such indeed were the diſpenſations of Divine Providence, that notwithſtanding their numberleſs corruptions, the Jews had for ſome years before the birth of Chriſt become ſo jealous of the veneration juſtly due to their law and prophets, as to hold more frequent aſſemblies in their temples and ſynagogues, for the purpoſe of hearing them read and explained. It is recorded of our Lord, that at a very early age he was found diſputing with the moſt learned of the Jewiſh doctors concerning the ſublimeſt truths; and when brought by his accuſers before the high prieſt, he ſaid of himſelf openly; "I taught in the ſynagogue, and in the "temple, where the Jews always reſort."

THAT the firſt Chriſtians purſued the ſame plan in their religious aſſemblies need not be told: but what would have been a matter of *choice* was with them a matter of ſtrict *neceſſity*; for the firſt miniſters of the goſpel

* Acts, xiii. 15.

had

had to make known its chief corner ſtone, a crucified Saviour—" To the Jews a ſtumbling block, and to the " Greeks fooliſhneſs;" they had to convince the Jews, that their law was a ſchoolmaſter to lead them to Chriſt; they had to convince the Gentiles, that both the Moſaic and the Chriſtian diſpenſations were of the ſame divine origin; and further, they had to inſtruct their hearers at large on almoſt every topic of moral, no leſs than religious wiſdom. It was indiſpenſably neceſſary for them therefore, to introduce readings of the Old Scriptures, when they aſſembled for prayer; and from thoſe Scriptures, as well as from their own knowledge, to publiſh, confirm, and eſtabliſh the great truths of the Goſpel. And their method of executing this important part of their office, in a word, their preaching, was ſimple, plain, and pure; far removed from the ſubtilties of philoſophy, or the niceties of art.

HENCE then, the practice of a mixed ſervice has been, under various modifications, derived to us; nor was it ever more neceſſary than in the preſent age, when vice and licentiouſneſs ſo daringly trample on the fences of morality, and when religion is ſo openly threatened to its very foundations.

THANKS,

THANKS, however, to the wiſdom and piety of thoſe, who have gone before us, we have an eſtabliſhed Liturgy, that excels every thing of the ſort ever invented for the uſe of man; and we have the book of God's word faithfully tranſlated into our native language. Thanks alſo to the ſeminaries of learned and religious education, we have guardians of our faith, able and ready to repel the keeneſt ſhafts of infidelity. But when principles of the moſt baneful malignancy are propagated with an infidious induſtry (for the meanneſs of the vehicle adds force to ſuch poiſon with the unwary and illiterate) and when we are threatened by moſt inveterate enemies, whoſe intentions have been too notoriouſly manifeſted, wherever their arms have prevailed; who avowedly aim, not merely at the overthrow of all eſtabliſhed orders, or the rapine of all eccleſiaſtical property; but at the actual extirpation of religion itſelf; at ſuch an alarming criſis, it is the duty of every friend to religion to ſtand forward, and to exert his utmoſt abilities in its ſupport. Is there a man not leagued againſt it, that does not feel himſelf animated in the common cauſe, and warm to defend it?

How its intereſts may be beſt ſerved and promoted by the generality of its friends, can ſcarce be a queſtion with

any

any of them. To expreſs an honeſt indignation againſt its enemies; to ſeparate himſelf from thoſe, who by their words or actions debaſe its character; and to juſtify and adorn it by his own, is in every man's power.

THEY eſpecially of our communion may all ſerve it effectually, by a ſtrict adherence to the principles of our national church, a ſteady obedience to its laws, an humble ſubmiſſion to its diſcipline, and more eſpecially by a regular and devout attendance on its ordinances.

THERE are many perſons preſent, who before our late calamity made a conſcience of diſcharging their religious duties on this ſpot; and, in general, the congregations uſually aſſembled here were remarkable for a ſerioufneſs of behaviour truly reſpectable and praiſe-worthy; but the times require *extraordinary* efforts; and when the axe is laid to the root of the tree, they, who beſt know the value of its fruits, ſhould be more than diligent to ward off the fatal ſtroke. Under ſuch circumſtances, beſides perſonal watchfulneſs, many will be the objects of every good man's care—a word ſpoken to others in due ſeaſon may be of great uſe, though of ſtill greater, a good example.

INFLUENCED

INFLUENCED by conſiderations of this nature, many perſons of diſtinction in this country have voluntarily entered into an engagement, which, if generally adopted and conſcientiouſly adhered to, could not fail of producing the happieſt effects. It is thus expreſſed:

"WE whoſe names are hereunto ſubſcribed, being "deeply ſenſible of the great importance of the religious "obſervance of the Lord's Day to the intereſts of chriſ-"tianity and civil ſociety, do declare, that we hold it "highly improper, on that day, to give or accept invita-"tions to entertainments or aſſemblies, or (except in "caſes of urgency or for purpoſes of charity) to travel, "or to exerciſe our worldly occupations, or to employ "our domeſtics or dependents in any thing interfering "with their public or private religious duties.

"And, as example and a public declaration of the "principles of our own conduct, more peculiarly at "this time, may tend to influence the conduct of "others, we do hereby declare our reſolution to ad-"here, as far as may be practicable, to the due ob-"ſervance of the Lord's Day, according to the preced-"ing declaration."

How

How far it may be practicable for others to go all the lengths of this pious reſolution, is a matter of private diſcretion; but aſſuredly, they, who ſhall make the attempt, will at leaſt give a ſtriking proof of their attachment to the common cauſe; nor can they fail ultimately to benefit themſelves.

LET it be remembered too; that if ſome ſituations in life are more liable than others to interruptions on the Lord's Day, ſuch ſituations require care in proportion to guard againſt them.

I CANNOT, therefore, too earneſtly recommend this conſpicuous example to the ſerious conſideration of all well-diſpoſed perſons amongſt us, who may, perhaps, be induced to form in their own neighbourhood reſolutions ſomething ſimilar, and who would undoubtedly be highly gratified in ſeeing this pariſh ſtill more honourably diſtinguiſhed by the proper *uſe* of its church, than it now is by the liberality of its *erection* *.

BUT

* It is with great ſatisfaction I learn; that, notwithſtanding the groſs miſrepreſentations of the temperate and well-judged declaration above-mentioned in ſeveral of the public prints, which, for a ſhort time, retarded its progreſs, it has been gradually and ſilently making its way; and has been already ſigned

But to conclude: They to whom the care of this building ſhall henceforth be intruſted, muſt remember that it is now ſolemnly conſecrated to the ſole purpoſes of religion; and that the laws of the land require of them to prevent, and will enable them to correct, any open profanations of it. They alſo who are to miniſter here will be bound in conſcience to diſcharge their reſpective duties with diligence and fidelity, adhering ſtrictly, and with due reverence, to all the appointed offices of our incomparable liturgy, and preaching the great truths of our moſt holy re-

by a conſiderable number of perſons, high in ſituation, rank, and character; and its principles adopted by many more, who have not given their actual ſignature to it. If an engagement ſomething ſimilar to this, but varied according to particular circumſtances of place or perſons, were entered into by the principal inhabitants of every pariſh in London and Weſtminſter, and their environs, and in every large provincial town (where ſuch a regulation is moſt wanted) it would very ſoon influence the practice of the lower claſſes of the community, and would thus revive throughout the kingdom a decent and reverential obſervance of the Lord's Day, on which, more than on any other circumſtance, depends the very exiſtence of Chriſtianity in this country. In fact, we know that when the government of France reſolved, as far as they were able, to extirpate Chriſtianity out of that country, they began with ſtriking Sunday out of their calendar, and diſcouraging all public worſhip on that day. We, therefore, who wiſh to preſerve Chriſtianity, muſt take a directly oppoſite courſe; muſt exert our utmoſt endeavours to keep up the ſpirit of that divine and benevolent inſtitution, and protect it with pious care againſt all the various inroads which worldly men are continually making upon it.

ligion.

ligion in ſimplicity and ſincerity. Under ſuch aſſurances, they now indulge the pleaſing hope of ſeeing thoſe, who have been ſo unfortunately and ſo long diſperſed, return again to their own pariſh church, with ſentiments of gratitude for the kind reception they have met with, in the interval, elſewhere; and with laſting reſpect for the miniſters, whom they have heard with ſo much pleaſure and advantage.

FINIS.

CMC
MVSEVM
BRITANNICVM